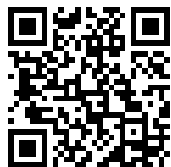

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ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN SUDANESE POETRY



Collected and Edited
by
Osman Hassan Ahmed
and
Constance E. Berkley

Sudanese Publication Series
(No. 10)



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OF
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Al-Jaily Abdel Rahman, "Children of the 'Spring Flower' Neighborhood," in I. Boulatta, opus cited.

We are also grateful for all the Sudanese friends who helped us in this project.

INTRODUCTION

This anthology of modern Sudanese poetry comprises works from the 1930's up to the present and includes contributions from both the northern and southern poets. In collecting these poems we were concerned primarily with their availability in English so that the collection has taken a different direction than might have occurred if the poems had been selected and translated. Fortunately there were a sufficient number of poems available in English (either translated or written originally in English) to make this collection representative of nearly all the major schools of modern Sudanese verse.

In the beginning we relied primarily on poetry translated in Dr. Mohammed I. al-Shoush's pamphlet Some background notes on modern Sudanese poetry. A number of the poems were obtained from Sudanow and other published sources. Our friend, Ahmed Yousif al-Tinay, was kind enough to give us some of his father's poems written in English. Babiker Ahmed Musa, Mohammed Ali Hamed, and Mubarak al-Maghrabi generously made their poetry available to us also. Al-Sir Khider was kind enough to send us his translations of several literary works. It is worth mentioning that several of the poems in this pamphlet appear for the first time in print.

The poems in this volume are arranged in approximately historical order, beginning with the work of al-Tigani Yousif Beshir, Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub and Yousif al-Tinay, poets of the 1930's - a period of great intellectual, literary and political

activity in the Sudan. A bridge between these early poets and the new generation is Mohammed al-Mahdi al-Magdoub, who stands alone, belonging by age and training to the first group, by subject to the new generation, and by style in a niche uniquely his own. The common thread among all the poets whose work is included here is that they were influenced - directly or indirectly - by Western culture and literature, thus separating them sharply from traditional Arabic poets.

Sirr Anai Kuelajang and Morris Onek Latan, both from the Southern region, write their poetry in English. Of all the other poets in this anthology, Yousif M. al-Tinay, Babiker A. Musa, Mohammed A. Hamad and Hussein Sharief wrote their poems in English. The rest is Arabic poetry translated in English.

We do not think the general reader is concerned with the history and evolution of the various schools of poetry represented here. We leave the verses to speak eloquently for themselves. Poetry in translation always loses some of its resonance and the delicate balance between meaning and meter is often altered, but we hope that the fine translations in this volume will give the reader some grasp of the style and substance of modern Sudanese poetry. We only wish that limitations of time and space had not made it impossible to include more of the growing number of Sudanese poets and more of the verse of each one.

Constance E. Berkley
Osman Hassan Ahmed
September 1982

THE TORMENTED SUFI*

Al-Tigani Yousif Beshir
(1911-1937)

How immense the secret this minute particle holds to the Universe.
 Watch it intensely, mix thy soul with its essence deeply and
 completely;
 Release thy spirit in its world abounding with faith and compassion
 Voyage in thy being among the greatest and the minutest in the
 cosmos,
 And you will perceive the whole universe in an unceasing hymn of
 praise.
 Enjoy the flower! the infinite store of its perfume!
 Fresh, nourished, its veins and roots penetrate deep into the
 earth
 And blossom forth in an ever-green riot.
 Ask the nightingale who has transformed the earth into a carnival
 of roses and colors:
 And ask the rose from whom it receives its beauty and its perfume.
 You will reach the heart of things and deep within perceive the
 truth that is.

* * * * * * * * *

The true existence is that which enters all throughout the soul
 And the pure silence is the peace that fastens on the spirit.

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

Within everything in this universe lives the spirit of God.
 This ant in its insignificance is a rebound of his echo.
 He lives within it and it lives on His earth.
 And when its soul is surrendered, His hand receives it.
 God never ceases to exist in it, if only you can perceive Him.

* * * * * * * * *

I was alone absorbing the whisper of the Universe
 I heard the vibration of the minutest particle and perceived its
 inner feeling,
 And the movement of the light when it flickered, I heard its
 sound
 And saw the festivity of the male rose and attended his wedding
 And the excitement of the vine when it burst open, I watched its
 birth.
 O God, Thou art great -- the Universe understands not itself,
 And from Thy fire, You have created its spirits and -- from Thy
 light -- mankind.

* * * * * * * * *

O God, from Thy first illumination on Adam's clay nations sprang,
 Flooding in the unknown, and from the clay
 A world and creatures crowded into the water and phantoms roamed
 free.
 The creation worshipped and I worshipped, it believed and I
 believed,

I emerged from the unknown, appeared, and it appeared.

* * * * *

In Thy great revelation and in the manifestation of Thyself
And in the bountiful overwhelming majesty which is just one of
Thy epithets

And the bright radiating compassion from the abundance of Thy
life

And in the highest absolute perfection and sublime divinity,
I have worshipped Thee with submission, fighting for Thy cause,
Surrendered my soul unto you and poured it in my prayers.

* * * * *

And now, what has come of my sincerity and devotion,
My soul has darkened, I see no more what once I saw.
O dust, that darkens my clear sky
To black death my aspiration and to the grave my hopes.
O heavenly bliss, now slipping away from me
Near it my soul flourished and my wrinkles vanished
The darkness of my doubt crept over the dawn of my faith.
Who has stolen all the pleasure and left me with my madness.

* * * * *

My ears, nothing passes through them but wailing
My eyes see nothing, big nor small
My soul has lost the feeling of Thy illumination and breathtaking
dawn

And the water -- now transformed to stone -- solidified in every path.

The melodies returned to the strings in such a short while.

And became lost forever in the darkness of my exhausted and sick lyre.

MEMORIES OF THE KHALWA*

Al-Tigani Yousif Beshir

He dragged himself from sleep, rubbing his eyes,
 Sullenly averting his face from the morning,
 Angrily cursing Heaven and everything on earth, human or ghost,
 His soul full of resentment.
 Finding no escape, furious at the thought of going,
 But called by the shadows that creep over the villages and valleys
 His imagination recalled the memories of horror
 And the Demon of rebellion returned to him.
 He walked sulkily, dragging his feet
 Sobbing with heavy heart,
 His ink-stained clothes filling his nostrils with acrid smell,
 His whole spirit mutinous.
 He steals a glance at his formidable master,
 To fathom the shadows of his temper.
 A glance from eyes filled with fear,
 Reveals the wound within.

* * * * *

How wonderful are the days of the Khalwa
 And marvellous the green childhood
 With its beautiful evenings.
 And how many a beautiful day
 Heralds its pride with beautiful colors

* / Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

The shadows of the morning
Throwing a cloak of beauty over it.
Flowers of different shades,
The daisy, the lily of the valley,
They have absorbed the sunshine,
As if rejoicing at the return of a lover,
Leading them to pleasure and delights.
And the young souls -- the power of sleep possessing them
And exhaustion claiming their spirits,
They nod their heads over their slates.
Whenever sleep overtakes them,
Enveloping them in its tender wings,
Thunder shakes the air, exploding with a curse.
The loud noise startles them,
Their murmuring continues -- their heads nod again,
And back the thundery storm returns.

BEAUTY*

Al-Tigani Yousif Beshir

We have worshipped you, O Beauty,
Surrendered our souls to you in love and devotion.
We have given you life and opened its fountains
For the sake of your eyes.
We have idolized every charming weakness in you
Until it overpowered and overflowed.
We have performed every task possible
To make you, O Riddle, comprehensible.
But you continue to be even more elusive.
We have endeavored to pursue distant meanings for you.
Yet you appear much nearer.

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

LITTLE ADAM*

Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub
(1908-1976)

At times he cries, at other plays
But clear enough he never cares!
He hopes, he begs and seeks attention
And holds his anger back and shows
His love. He asks for the moon
But failing to get it, cries.

* * * * *

This self deluded child
With his ups and downs .
His chatter and his calmness
Rules the world, builds and forms.
He nags at cat turning its tail
Yet fears the tiny ant.
He metes out charity when he loves
And can be miserly when he's cross
You are a secret whose nature none
Can know. A devil are you
Or an angel, dear?

* * * * *

You are a mould of evil and of good,
Of envy too. You feed your bird

The seeds, yet torture the lamb.
 Your baby brother gets your wrath
 You humiliate him, and suffer if he's happy.

* * * * *

With eagerness and joy you get
 This lovely toy, to show
 To friends with pride. But, lo
 Tomorrow does not come until
 The toy is all destroyed.

* * * * *

And tomorrow. Ah! for the morrow
 You adapt yourself to time's needs
 You'll stop your play, and start to learn
 You'll sit up late in a studious effort
 And suffer life's eternal ironies.

* * * * *

You'll have your wishes, but with so much fear
 From what our mortal wishes cost
 You'll sacrifice and suffer and woo,
 And know of love, what we all have known
 And what is right and wrong in life.

* * * * *

Then you forget, my darling child,
 The sweetness of such human wishes

And see paradise as a quiet cottage
 When man and wife with sons do gather
 And in children see hope.

* * * * *

You may, or may not write verse
 And achieve in the prime of youth, your glory
 Or spend, in utter misery, all your life
 You are a picture of myself.

* * * * *

You are part of me, and I am
 What previous generations have weaved,
 You are but an image of Adam,
 Where dawn and evening look their best
 And so are people, shadows and images.

A SONG FOR HER

Yousif M. Al-Tinay
(1909-1969)

For you, my dear, my very dear one,
I sing like a bird when full of fun,
With the golden sunset and morning dew,
For you I sing and only for you!

* * * * *

When you and I fell in love together,
We threw ourselves into scared fire,
And so our souls were thus purified,
And love remained but vanity died.

* * * * *

And the seal of love was a long deep kiss,
The charm of which we could never miss,
In a long embrace and with closed eyes,
We found ourselves in paradise.

DOUBT AND CERTAINTY

Yousif M. Al-Tinay

What a loss and what a waste is loving

Someone who does not know love!

What a loss and what a waste are

Tears for that who does not wipe them!

* * * * *

May God forgive me! How often

She was generous with her tears.

Whenever we saw tears being shed.

* * * * *

And was driven by love to offer her

sweet kiss,

And the sweet juice of her lips

Quenched my thirst when I sipped it.

* * * * *

And she calmed down my anxious

Heart whenever it shivered with

Eagerness and thus saved it.

* * * * *

If my heart doubted her love to me

It is the jealousy of love which shook it.

* * * * *

And love is the best excuse ever offered
By that who was frightened by foolish jealousy.

* * * * *

She is the darling other than whom

I have none,

And the darling whom I recognize
By her honey-like qualities.

* * * * *

My love to her increases every moment,
Like rains falling from a generous cloud.

* * * * *

I feel heart-comfort whenever my eyes
Look at hers,
And see in them a sea whose jewel-shells
Are inaccessible to divers.

* * * * *

(Her eyes) are very deep in their meanings,
The clearest of which is that love
Has yielded the flower we are picking.

* * * * *

Each of us is drunk with the other's love,
And so neither the gossipers nor anything
else will dissuade him.

* * * * *

I am the happy one with her,
 Both as a lover and a darling.
 How fortunate is the heart whose
 Sentiments have not been in vain!

* * * * *

So! how could my heart in spite of
 The happiness that it enjoys, allow
 Its fears to attack it every now and then?

* * * * *

May what it fears of her change,
 Never take place until it
 Stops to beat!

HEART - BEATS

Yousif M. Al-Tinay

This heart that beats, is beating for you,
 And will never beat for another too.
 It did know love, some time in the past,
 But you, for sure, will be his last.

* * * * *

Please hear its beats, please hear them again,
 You will hear it say: Elain, Elain;
 Like a Monk praying in his lonely shrine,
 It repeats your name, for you are mine!

* * * * *

It has been enslaved by your sweet eyes,
 For you it lives, for you it dies,
 If with a kiss my wounds you heal,
 For you, as a goddess, I bow, I kneel.

Athens
 February 1963

KHARTOUM

Yousif M. Al-Tinay

Khartoum - My Paradise!

Khartoum - My Beloved Land!

* * * * *

Winter has come so take me home,
 To the warmth and splendor of Khartoum,
 For there I can live my best days,
 And there I can go my own ways.

* * * * *

There in Khartoum, the sky is a deep deep blue,
 There are no gray clouds, they're of brighter hue,
 And free and unhurried the soft Nile breeze
 Lovingly kissess the great palm trees.

* * * * *

'Tis paradise for a couple in love,
 There cupid hovers like a dove,
 Under the moon they dance and sing,
 There is no winter, there is no spring.

* * * * *

Winter has come so take me home,
 To the warmth and splendor of Khartoum,
 For there I can live and roam,
 This is Khartoum, this is my home!

BIRTH*

Mohammed Al-Mahdi Al-Magdhoub
(1918-1982)

Hand on the Prophet, God
Look not upon my sins
But help me to greater repentance!
For those alive with me
Love the forbidden.

* * * * *

We used to go the unguided road
Without God's hand showing the way,
And so we quarreled, we fought
On the purposeless path so long
We didn't care since we were living death
If we were going towards peace
Or lost ourselves in void.

* * * * *

Can good combine with evil?
Power spring from the atom?
Pregnant with death's cypher
Can it slay war and escape with peace?
As strength so that we can pursue it?

*/ Translated by: Charles Doria and Salma al-Khadra al-Jayyust.

Will Earth return to love and joy?

* * * * *

Praise to You, God!

Powerful Willful God,

You sent us a herald,

A warning sign of light,

A great flame to guide us,

A messenger of Your Eye

Without whose light

We wouldn't have seen you,

The Maker of all things,

In so many of this world's things:

Yes, Your Prophet

Who made death hope

And deathlessness a tree

Whose flowers refusing to wither

Never die.

* * * * *

Hand on the Prophet, God,

On the Prophet, the best among us,

Who on the night of Hira'

Saddled a moon,

Flower of the full moon in the sky,

By whose light we read life's wisdom,

The secrets of permanence,

Thanks to God who guides us,
Teaching with the words of his pen
What we did not know.

* * * * * * * * *

Hand on the Prophet, God:
Overlook my sins,
Help me to greater sorrow for them!

* * * * * * * * *

Maulid* Night

Secret of all nights, of all beauty,
Spring enchanting me with virtue's charm
Tonight my Moslem land burns bright
With the works of imagination
It circles the shiekhs' pillar,
Blossoming with cluster lights,
Like Pleiads' light,
Unveils woman's magic lustre
In countless ways,
Her loveliness fashioned by light
Light reveals.

On Abdul Mun'im's Square* (who loved the people -
Rain fall on his grave and bless him!)
The thousands who meet here
Only on this Holy day rejoice,

Their painted tents granted

This one passionate night.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For it's here an old man

Rocks to and fro, circling,

Pounding the nuba* dancer

Keep circling, bowing,

Like waves, back, forth,

Up, down, their leaping

Filling the night

Under the long banners

That float from tent poles

Like a drunken ship

On the mountain sea.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

They meet, join souls

Hand on shoulder greeting, feasting

They dance! they dance!

Finding they drink together

The taste of joy:

Eager feet stepping in,

Treading out the dance!

Swift they move like birds,

Kicking up jallabias*,

Dervishes* turning,

Never stopping spinning!

Feet jerking, swaying
 In the nets of their robes
 Like fires of flame!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Karir* drum beats louder
 Than nuba's echo,
 Each dancer Rippling, bubbling,
 Rising like a fountain!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Now a moment of peace
 Quells the ringing dance,
 Now body forgets self,
 Spirit radiant with light
 Relaxes, the old man's eyes
 Close on a universe still
 Dreaming its great dream.
 The mugaddam*, that great shiekh,
 Raises his voice in song,
 Drawing near he pounds the sweating drum,
 From his mouth scattering
 The Holy words of the rites:
 Everywhere the circle of his dancing
 Bending where he bends,
 His drum a fire on fire!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Someone singing calls out
 To an old man people say is Crocodile.
 For he, chosen for great things,
 Speaks to them in poet's tongue
 Learned from the Tariqas Master,
 Poor man grown wealthy
 On the fruits of his self-denying,
 The patches of his robe
 Make a garden of all color,
 Stranger to this earth,
 Just a cane for company,
 Prayer beads of Lalub*
 Looped around his neck,
 Soldiers for disciples,
 He wears a hat with horns
 Over his broad forehead
 Which marks each shift
 Faith's light takes.

* * * * *

In the tar* dancing circle
 A young man rocks this way then that,
 Bending while he plays a plaint cane,
 Slowly executes the chanter's song,
 Retreats, repeating longing's words -
 Longing seizing him once more!
 The lovers around him take up his cry,

To greet God they also melt away in love,

Shaking their canes they shout:

"Good luck there, young fella,

You've got what you want!"

* * * * *

Hand on the Prophet, God,

Help and support me with Him

Who speaks for the people

On Judgment Day -

With Him who drinks pure water

From Al-Kauthar*, Paradise river.

* * * * *

On the square's other side

Clear light spreads

A rainbow of hope and joy,

A spring flowing through

the darkness of night,

Dance driving souls here

Slowly one moment,

Another faster than breath!

* * * * *

Here a girl dark as

The shadows her veil draws

Sways on young hips

Shyly, modestly, possibly .

Sayig hello, calling you
 With the fringe of her thaub*.
 In chains she is free,
 In harmony she is chaos:
 Should she leave,
 Disappear from sight,
 Then that pretty Maulid candy doll
 Vendors hawk, that princess
 Robed in hue of every color
 Becomes she I adore.
 A little thing but how pretty!
 Braced there on her throne
 In the carnival high above
 Islands of sweets,
 Pearls in the myths
 Imagination treasures.

* * * * *

Though she does not
 Here downcast eyes speak!
 Children turn around her,
 Dark eyes glinting rainbows
 Beam their hope for her,
 Joyfully misted in tears.

* * * * *

God! how their poverty wastes them,

The tiny children who come here

On Your Prophet's Birthday,

Longing for joy, but went home

Taste of dust in their mouth.

Weep for the mother

Who'd give them stars

If they asked! Yes,

Weep for her:

She carries nights without sleep

All through the brightness of the day.

* * * * *

God! You sent an orphan child

Into the world to stand up

For the right, for what is just.

He was kind to us,

We remember him tonight.

Aren't we here to honor in mind

All those without a thing in the world?

* * * * *

In the people's market on the other side

Of the square there's trumpet and drum

Shouting up hunger and its cure,

A tiny kingdom revolving

Around is famous kettle of stew

Which grabs our eyes
 And steals away thought:
 And Why not? tell me,
 Pleasure of the night
 Mistress of attraction?
 From where he stands
 The stall-owner looks around,
 A barker, a pitchman,
 At the huge crowd
 Sniffing up the meat smoke
 Whirling from his fiery grill:
 O! a flame that found
 None of us disobedient when it
 Called us to the dinner
 It laid in our thoughts.

* * * * *

All around the king chef
 Stately braziers fumed,
 Putting up with skewers
 Strung with meat cubes,
 Fat and dripping.

* * * * *

It was a kitchen
 We'd entered
 Busier, noisier

Than a prince's court,
 its substantial owner
 So full of good wit
 One circle of diners
 After another visted him.
 We ate and were at peace,
 We drank and felt so full
 Eating and drinking
 No longer made sense.
 Then we left and walked,
 Sleep dragging at our heels
 If only we felt and walked,
 How we'd thank fate!
 And so the night went by;
 Bed called me and I obeyed,
 Leaving feasting behind,
 And the thousands who hoped
 For life's full food:
 But no rains came,
 Each soul faint,
 Thirsty in the dust.

* * * * *

Echo recalled distant drums
 Like a cryig child
 All alone at night.
 A snatch of song flew into my ear,

In the darkness already signifying
 New dawn on the horizon,
 New promises coming true tommorow!

* * * * *

In my Muslim land, God,
 We have returned to You;
 Depending, O my God, solely on You,
 We remember tonight the Chosen Guide
 Who filled our spirit
 With his purity and patience.

* * * * *

Hand on the Prophet, God,
 Look not upon my sins
 But help me to greater repentance!

PICK-POCKET

Mohammed Al-Mahdi Al-Magdhoub

He hungers and sees not
 His greed becoming myriad eyes,
 In every eye a gaping mouth.

* * * * * * * * * *

Hunger plunged him in a daze
 His food: mere crumbs
 From tables rich with food
 Around him all was grilled with rust
 Wrapped in mirage, darkened by passing clouds.

* * * * * * * * * *

And suffering does not only come from fire
 With every breath
 For suffering is the pain of hungry bellies
 And crumbs are not the answer to a dream,
 But a wave of madness.

* * * * * * * * * *

He gasped in tired breaths pursuing mad desire
 How many long-awaited hours
 Have come and gone, fulfilling not their word
 How many long-awaited hours

Have come and gone to come again perhaps.

* * * * *

Cafes with open doors have seen him oft'

Pass and drunk not,

Partake not of their myriad glasses

And rest not on their many chairs.

* * * * *

His footsteps to a mosque did lead

Seeking a pallet in the dark of night

Where maybe he could put his pain to sleep

In an earthly resting-place for man.

* * * * *

He slept, and in his weary frame he put to sleep

Valleys of grief and mounts of care

Awaking behind slumber dark

Treasures in which food did glow.

Sparkling drinks and loaves of gold,

His meagre crumbs in dreams becoming

Tables alive with richest meats,

His world now wrapped in clearest mines

His desert covered by mirage.

Of him was nothing left

But sadness cloaked in robes

That went and come like a ghost.

* * * * *

The night was calm save for a passing breeze
 And stars that murmured in the dark.
 The light had broken from its chains
 With its last breath
 Fed by the fields that it had fed
 Moving in slow and pleasant weariness,
 The dew turning to leaves within its ribs
 A bird regained its nest
 To sleep within the grainfilled nest
 Its beak unweary
 Beside a singing brook,
 A blue horizon in its wings
 Amid a dawn perfumed with flowers.

* * * * *

And morn came back unaware
 A birth once more
 The wretched man came back to life
 Dragging his weariness.
 When flames of burning morn had set his feet on
 fire
 Sleep called again from yonder shade
 Where water-jugs stood covered in coolness
 A tin cup on their necks
 He longed for his long-gone mother
 And shed the tears of memory

He slept, his dreams strung in thongs
 Without a friend, without a friend.
 Nothing could he do but wait,
 Nothing could he do but flee.

* * * * *

And time went by,
 His heart watched from afar his endless wait
 He came by the grave of a Holy man
 Where people thronged around the grave
 With offerings for the Holy man,
 A tree that grows and flowers not
 Save with sighs of grief
 A wound upon which the wounded rests
 He walks
 His food the endless road
 Where throngs and throngs search for a long-lost crumb
 And find only disaster.

* * * * *

He was surprised to see the thin fingers on his palm grow long
 And in his heart a jungle roared.

* * * * *

In the noise of the market and the crowd
 He threw his emaciated palm
 To fall upon a frightened wave.

It came back to him furtively
 With something which he could not see
 But which a passer-by did see.
 The Ivy grew on the courtroom bars
 Changing his criminal mien
 Rootless
 He fell within the courtroom cage
 His arms around the iron bars,
 His gaze upon the open chasm.

* * * * *

Justice looked down from a lofty place
 Peace be with it
 Dressed in clean robes, its voice a whisper
 Wise-looking, turning page-by-page
 Licking its chops
 Making of every word a polished sword,
 A dog with mangy, burning flesh
 With empty patches in its fur
 Its naked fangs agleam
 Alive with rabid flame
 His master taming him with stone.

THE EMPTY CONCH

Mohammed Al-Mahdi Al-Magdhoub

I stood on the red sea surf,
The waves were blue, the waves were green,
The waves were yellow, the waves were gray
My eye was there

At the horizon . . .

There

The waves were still . . .

The waves

Like a broken wall

In an emptiness, breaking an emptiness.

An emptiness . . .

Surrrounded by petrified waves of sand.

And where my head turned, waves

Waves,

Waves.

* * * * * * * * *

And then, my eyes pulled me back,

Where at my feet

It had thrown an empty conch,

From beneath the depths of this torrential sea,

And from its movement in the depths, it took its shape,

And had its life, and then it crawled,

Running along the surf . . .

Then,

It lost its motion

And the frame remained.

My eyes were there

At the horizon . . .

Where yet, the waves were still . . .

The waves like a broken wall, breaking an emptiness.

The sandy waves had surrounded it,

And fossilized upon it.

And me, I am calm

While within my calm

Exists an exhausting hollowness, and a mysterious memory.

* * * * *

My life is full of empty conches.

And only yesterday I buried an empty conch.

I had taken its shape and its life from my life.

Now,

It is resting beneath the earth . . .

There in the graves

Extending across the horizon . . .

Am I an empty conch,

Is my grave there . . .

Could my country never see

What poets perceive

In the hustle of life.

I saw an empty conch . . .

Meaningless words

Issuing from its hollow inside

And the people were waves . . .

Around the conch,

They were hushed,

Admiring

Yet never seeking.

* * * * *

Then, even poetry,

Poetry was wine.

It no longer heals . . .

I remembered an Arab poet

Who had prophesied . . .

And he had asked himself, pain piercing his sense:

If I ask for pure dark-red wine . . .

I find it,

While missing still

The one beloved of my soul . . .

Am I a stone?

And,

Could he see, the blind man of al-Ma'arra*?

MAN IN SUDAN AND VIETNAM*

Mohammed Al-Mahdi Al-Magdhoub

In my Country I know the pains of childbirth
 And the death of the mother
 Our doctor is a butcher
 The poor see it as Destiny and not the treachery of scientists
 What does Destiny think about the poor?
 What does Destiny think about ministers?
 And we accept the excuses of criminals
 All things are the same
 Even the knowledge of scientists has excuses
 Living is Destiny
 Dying is Destiny
 And being blind I cannot choose

* * * * * * * * *

And our doctor
 The price list and the knife
 Are in the patient's pocket
 Not in the illness
 Behind a curtain there is
 A cat that provokes visitors
 And without scruples, counts the money.

* * * * * * * * *

*/ Translated by: Mursi Saad Eddine.

When he invited his fair friend one evening
 You talked to her and poured out your sorrows
 While she thought about fashions
 But I blame you for complaining to a vampire
 Truth is your enemy, so fill your soul with aggression
 And in it there is consolation
 Hatred is a remedy.
 He is good at killing . . . dressed in clean white attire
 And I killed Mona and Galal Al-Din
 And the light in my eyes is dead.
 They excused him and said that Destiny willed it
 And not the knowledge of scientists.
 How can one say this when the killer wished it
 And the hospital is a rabid dog
 The people are graves

* * * * * * * * *

The Nile flows irrigating only sufferings
 Patience is a certainty that erases the definition of things
 The baked palms look at the horizons,
 And the throat is dry, signalling
 And our doctor with the mirage of knowledge
 In his hands, yet we come back to him.

* * * * * * * * *

I am a man
 Suffering in Hanoi, in the Sudan

We struggle, we carry the burden of justice
 Off the shoulders of the Creator
 People's eyes, here and there have but one vision
 We struggle with the light of the Sun
 We struggle hand-in-hand.
 And we struggle
 The pearls are in the bottom of the sea
 Like our souls in the depth of the oppressing prison
 And the cry side-by-side with the victim.
 And the glitter of the sharp sword.

* * * * *

I am man
 I return with my laughing wounds, the pain in my belief.
 Jesus was not crucified, and the nail
 Is a dollar dropped by a Chinese poet.
 Oh Moon of truth, shine from the ruins of Hara*
 Death is a remedy and the martyrs are eternity.
 I knocked at the door
 The light became conscious at my knock
 And the laughing Kohl* and the curtains.
 And the cries of the baby at birth
 I am man.

NATURE ON THE BANK OF THE NILE*

Mubarak Al-Magrabi
(1920-1982)

It's no ordinary scene, nor common water, the sight
we perceive;

It is the bank of River Nile, a splendid paradise
Whose glamorous radiance evokes temptations
And proffers the delightful emotions we conceive.

* * * * *

Embracing all images of the marvels we feel,
And exhibiting arrays of wonderous beauty.
Ever seen fragrant flowers crowning dew-speckled greens?

* * * * *

Or, at dusk in silence listened to the water wheel
Groaning in tempo with singing birds in the Sky-line?
Oh, so magnificently charming everything appears,
Especially when bathed in the romantic moonlight
And breeze so gentle! No wonder, the world is mine.
Love, visions, lofty garden in moonlit night,
Pastoral surroundings, sailing boats and Aphrodite,
Over all reflection on the glittering surface,
The graceful swaying of branches in the dead of night,
Silhouette of palm trees magestically towering in space.

*/ Translated by: Dr. Hassan Abbas Subhi.

O'luxuriant bank of the mighty Nile!
 The God-bestowed early grand paradise
 For poets to put their words in proper place.

* * * * *

O'beloved Nile, we respectfully thee glorify
 There, our lifeblood rein, our symbol of brotherliness,
 Our luminous light house, for wise guidance.
 With all thy generous floods in thy southern sources
 Thou reduceth not thy profuse abundance north.
 O'mighty river, for ever to thee we two nations are loyal
 Hence, glory, posterity and happiness we maintain.

LOVER OF THE RIVER*

Mubarak Al-Magrabi

At dawn, with all the stars sparkling above
 And mysterious silence predominantly prevailing,
 He came to the River, his eternal friend,
 To pay him homage and get the thing he did love.

* * * * *

He joyfully performed his fruitful strife,
 Singing his immortal melodious song,
 And attaining his need of plentiful catch,
 He prayed in gratitude to Creator of life.

* * * * *

Back to his abode ere it was broad daylight
 With captives well deserved as fair reward.
 Around him his children, completely enamoured,
 Would hail him: they felt as gay, so bright.

* * * * *

Their scanty repas seemed lavishly prime,
 And they boisterously enjoyed a wholesome feast,
 Tenaciously he hugged his little angels
 And told them of faces and places and time.

* * * * *

*/ Translated by: Dr. Hassan Abbas Subhi.

In to deep slumber he drowned all strains;
Aloof from sadness he has always stayed,
Wouldn't care less, ever trusting the morrow
With all its ups and downs - he never complains.

* * * * *

O'Lover of the River, numerous men of wealth
Would give their fortunes for happiness as yours.
But pleasure of the soul can't be bought for riches
And glittering gold is dirt, compared with health.

AFRICA IS FOR US*

Mubarak Al-Magrabi

The fulfilment Africa is,
 The fertility, the offering
 Her paradises, well in perfume,
 Are smiling with beauty.
 The shines of day are on her forehead,
 Are indeed torches lightening all homes.
 Africa like her color is a captivation
 Proud of herself, never to submit to humiliation.
 Struggle to her is sweet, so is sacrifice
 In love she is with drums and singing.
 For the heritage she is;
 The new she is.
 Never, at all, loyal she is but for herself.

* * * * *

Africa is for us
 By my oath she will be by us,
 By our determination to reach the far,
 By hard work and by her new consciousness.
 No longer for others she is a source of wealth.
 No longer, heating stones during winter, she is.
 For the aggressive foreigner,
 Coming to under-rate her noble heritage.

*/ Translated by: Dr. Hassan Abbas Subhi.

Africa is the virgin nature,
 The Brown beautiful damsel,
 Never does she accept a commandment,
 Or ever ask for a protection.
 Africa for her people is the endowment of God.

* * * * *

Africa is the abode of the pure
 The temples of beauty,
 The stages of imagination,
 How many a greedy one, around her kept wandering.
 Hoping to see disagreement prolonged
 O'do tell her people, her leaders of struggle,
 Do go on . . . what we all aspire for is quite at hand,
 And who for it sang out praising the achievement,
 Morning has indeed shone,
 And the winds have blown,
 Africa has advanced and will never never retreat.

MYSTERIOUS WORLD

Babiker Ahmed Musa
(1924-)

The world, though wide, seems like a needle-eye
If Thou be sad;
And needle-eye seems like the world
If thou be glad.
Mysterious world I questioned thee,
But ne'er heardst thou me
Mysterious world, mysterious world!
Thy riddle is not deciphered yet;
It's twisting, twisting like a net;
When'er my brain doth contemplate
I deem thee prison, O prison of humanity
The sky is not a wall without a gate,
And stars its gailers watching wait,
Spying eyes of eternity.
Mysterious world, mysterious world.

1941

SHE

Mohammed Ali Hamad
(1924-)

Those charming eyes of yours will kill me
And yet so madly them I adore.
And these beauteous gems have robbed me
Of all the dew for life I store.

* * * * *

Shall I mention the rosy cheeks
That were lightly stroked with parrots beaks,
On the perfect design of nose teeth and chin,
On the slender figure which is neither fat nor thin?

Please tell me,
With your love save me.

* * * * *

But shrill not a single note through those lips,
For as they're apt to dissolve in lemon sips
Ne'r can they stand vibrations of your soft voice:
They're meant for kisses and not for noise.

Please tell me,
With your love save me.

* * * * *

Who planted golden fibre on that ling head
To make jealous then my rivals blood I shed?

Who unpassionately passed the hard comb between plant and soil?
 Do I say unpassionate? Ney, that can't be
 When I feel the fragrance your fingers have left as oil
 And eyes other than yours such beauty on a mirror they never can
 see.

Please tell me,
 With your love save me.

* * * * *

Close those eyes to preserve the human race
 Let them not shoot a single ray in space,
 For the moon is jealous and may start to betray
 As the sun burns with envy during the day.

Please tell me,
 With your love save me.

* * * * *

Switch off that smile for heaven's sake.
 For those who glimpse it Da Vinci for the style they will no
 more take.
 And as you've hidden yourself for Venus to have your seat,
 Be merciful on Rafael and Mozart don't beat.

Not enough to greet,
 To quench that heat
 Our hearts should meet,

Or else, quick, hide yourself from head to feet.*

Omdurman, 1948.

*/ Feet is substituted for "foot" for the sake of the rhyme.

TO TWO UNKNOWN EYES*

Mohammad Al-Fayturi
(1930-)

Mistress

Should these enamored words chance to meet your eyes

Or pass between your lips

Then forgive me; it was your eyes

In whose shade one evening I leaned resting

And snatched brief slumber

In their repose I caressed the stars and moon

I wove a boat of fancy out of petals

And laid down my tired soul

Gave to drink my thirsty lips

Quenched my eyes' desire

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Mistress

When we met by chance as strangers meet

My sorrow too was walking on the road

Bare, unveiled

With heavy tread

You were my sorrow

Sadness and loss

Silence and regret

*/ Translated by: Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar -- with the kind permission of University of California Press.

Were embracing a poet consumed by struggle
 For poetry, mistress, is a stranger in my land
 Killed by emptiness and void
 My spirit trembled when I saw you
 I felt suddenly as if a dagger delved into my blood
 Cleansed my heart, my mouth
 Prostrated me with soiled brow and supplicating hands
 In the shade of your sweet eyes

* * * * * * * * * *

Mistress

If suddenly we meet
 If my eyes see those your eyes
 High-set, green, drowned in mist and rain
 If on the road by another change we meet
 And what is changed but fate?
 Then would I kiss the road, kiss it twice.

SAD SATURDAY NIGHT*

Mohammed Al-Fayturi

Tonight, tonight, O sad-eyed girl
 The cactus tree has bloomed
 Over our ancient grave.
 The little cactus tree has bloomed
 Spreading its black shade over our remains
 As if not content that we've become estranged
 And that it sucks the bleeding of our souls.
 It stretches its branches over us crosswise
 Wrapping up corpses without shrouds.

* * * * * * * * *

Tonight, tonight, my sweetheart
 My eyes were with the clouds
 A corpse imprisoned by a wall
 Greater than what you see, O sad-eyed girl.
 Pitch-black by night, pitch-black by day
 It buries us, digs our grave twice a day
 While we are but two corpses
 On whose faces is nothing but a smile of scorn
 And a sob of death.

* * * * * * * * *

Tonight there are tears, tonight there is regret

*/ Translated by: Issa J. Boullata - with the kind permission
 of Three Continents Press.

A million flowers being crushed underfoot

A murdered face smiling

A bloody sun menstruating

Torment mixed with boredom

The lips fettered

The forehead whipped

The veils of God burnt

Even my eternal cup is disfigured

My sacred vessel is shattered

What horrid pain!

SORROW OF THE BLACK CITY*

Mohammed Al-Fayturi

When the night sets up its trellis of twigs
 On the city streets
 And sprinkles its deep sorrow on them,
 You see them quietly resigned
 Staring at the cracks
 And so you think they are submissive
 But--they are on fire!

* * * * * * * * *

When the dark builds up
 On the city streets
 Its marble statues
 Which it ungratefully destroys,
 And when its spiral stairs
 Take creatures downwards
 To a deep remote past,
 And when its amber shores
 Are drowned in memories
 Almost never to awake
 And when in every soul rises a wall
 Of clay, diamonds, and desires
 And the night becomes sleepy

*/ Translated by: Issa J. Boullata.

And a day rises as lamps in array
 Are set against the darkness,
 The blood of tranquility becomes
 As dry as tombs

And the heart of the city becomes
 Like a despicable thing
 Like a stove in midday heat
 Like a lamp in a blind man's way
 Like Africa in the dark ages:
 An old woman shrouded in incense
 A pit for a bonfire
 An owl's beak
 A breast's horn

* * * * *

An amulet with an ancient prayer
 A night with many mirrors
 A dance of naked blacks
 Singing in black joy
 In absence of sins
 Worried by the master's lust
 And by ships laden with comely slave-girls,
 Musk, ivory, and saffron,
 Gifts without festivities
 Driven by the wind at every moment

To the white man of this age

Master of every age.

A plantation extends in the world of imagination

Clothing the naked, undressing the nude

Its gloom running in the veins of life

Coloring the waters

Dyeing the face of God

Its sorrows being a laugh on the lips

Growing even tyrants

Even slaves

Even iron

Even fetters

Growing something new every day.

* * * * *

But when the dark builds up

On the city streets

Barriers of black stone

They stretched out their hands in silence

To the balconies of the morrow

Their cries imprisoned

Their land imprisoned

Their days being wounded memories

Of a wounded land

Their faces, like their hands, sad

You see them quietly resigned

Staring at the cracks

And so you think they are submissive

But--they are on fire!

TO A WHITE FACE*

Mohammed Al-Fayturi

Is it that my face is black,
And thine is white
That you call me a slave
And trample my humanity,
Despise my beliefs
And forge my bonds,
Drink the fruit of my vines unjustly,
Feed from my corn with insolence
And leave me with bitterness?
Wear the cloth that I have toiled to weave
And leave me garbed in sighs and struggles?
You live in a Garden of Eden
Where the stone was carved by my own hands
Whilst I crouch so long in the caves of night
Covering myself with darkness and the cold,
Like a goat feeding on my misery,
The smoke of my insignificance billowing around me.
And When the river of dawn rises and overflows,
I wake my thin sheep and guide them to the fields
And when they are fattened, you enjoy their meat
And throw to me the entrails and skin.
No, brother, no. My inflamed feelings

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

Cannot now be calmed.

Alas, I am not an owl

That can feed on worms, or a monkey.

I am human, both your mother and mine are clay

And the light is grandsire to none of us.

So why do you deny me my rights

While you enjoy your pleasures:

How long will you raise your head as my master

And I lower mine as your slave?

Is it because your face is white

And mine is black?

* * * * *

And when death is a slave

And when aggression is but a slave

And when the free are slaves in a conquered land

And when the master fate is a slave

In the guise of God

And messages of prophets are misleading

And religions are meant to falsify,

Spring from every grave in my land

All the forgotten dead, all broken spirits

Hating humanity, and all the enemies of humanity

Pouring their scorn on heaven, fate and destiny.

AFRICA*

Mohammed Al-Fayturi

Africa awake. Wake up from your black dream.
 You have slept so long, are you not weary --
 Are you not tired of the master's heel.
 You have lain so long under the darkness of night
 Exhausted in your decrepit hut
 Demented with yellow hope
 Like a woman who with her own hands
 Builds the darkness of tomorrow
 Hungry, chewing her days
 Like the paralysed watchman of the cemetery
 With a naked past
 And no glory to crown the future, nor greatness.

* * * * * * * * * *

Africa awake, wake up from your dark self.
 How the world has passed you by
 How the stars have revolved above you.
 The malevolent rebuilds what he destroyed
 And the pious despises what he once worshipped
 But you, you are where you were
 Like the skull of a dead castaway
 And like a dead man's skull you are.
 Wonder that your veins did not burst

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

From their sarcastic laughter.

You are nothing but a slave.

* * * * *

Let the corpses of our history be resurrected

Let the statue of our hate be erected.

The time has come for the black

Hidden till now from the eyes of light,

The time has come for him to challenge the world,

The time has come for him to defy death.

Let the sun bow down to us,

Let the earth fear our voices.

We will fill it with our happiness

As we filled it with our sorrows.

Yes, our turn has come, Africa,

Our turn has come.

A JOURNEY

Mohammed Al-Fayturi

What do I see, O darkness.
 A caravan of hunchbacks
 Plodding its way in the night,
 Barefoot, naked, gasping,
 Weeping, complaining and praying.
 Driven by a frightful giant
 Planting misery in their souls.
 A giant full of pride and haughtiness
 And his chest seethes with hate and madness.
 Weep with me for the procession of victims
 Filling the air with their cries and moans.
 It is an ancient play
 Acted by Khafra and Mina.
 And still after thousands of years
 The Pharaohs still dominate the centuries.
 Why are we so unmoving?

* * * * *

What do I see, O tears,
 A palace which glory created.
 Are those its walls,

* / Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

Or mirrors on the walls untarnished.
 O garden of paradise in your greatness,
 We lost you when we desired you
 And we desire you when we cannot possess you.
 Do not diffuse thy perfume,
 The smell of our huts has stifled us.
 Do not dance to the Spring,
 For the darkness of our huts has blinded us.

* * * * *

What do I see, O life.
 My perplexity is driving me mad.
 Two graves, one built of marble,
 Whose colors dazzle the eye,
 The other engraved on a stone,
 I swear it could hardly be noticed.
 On one the spring is abundant,
 With roses and jasmine.
 On the other treads the autumn,
 Blessing the accursed thorn trees.
 Woe to us, O just God,
 Whose ordinances make a mockery of us.
 Even in front of mortality there is a balance
 To sift the jewel from the dust.

MIGRATION FROM SAY*

Al-Jaily Abdel Rahman
(1931-)

They crowd the shore like distant memories
With the anguished heart of a poet.
They kiss my mother on her face
And wave to the crowded boat.
And my uncle moistens my head with his tears,
His beard rasps my cheeks
And his moustache brushes my eyelids
He said, with the tears in his eyes
Falling heavily down his cheeks,
And in his heart hesitant hopes
Which he whispers to the night in his sleeplessness:
"My son, my son, when you reach safety
And discover what God has seen fit to give you,
Say to your father, 'Remember your brother,
Remember him always in his loneliness'."

* * * * *

Old men on the shore squat under the palm trees
Like ghosts in some grotesque legend
Which the waters whisper, mocking, to the shores,
Waters, laughing, rebellious.
An old man stares at those who are waiting,

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

And behind the palm trees at a distance
 Resignedly stand the scattered huts.
 And when the sails of the boat
 Are hoisted aloft against the horizon,
 The tears of the heart dim the eye,
 Hopes are filling the heart of the boy
 As his mother is singing to him all the time
 That in Egypt there are oranges, treasures, much to eat,
 And high places that touch the clouds of the sky.

* * * * *

And my uncle died there.
 He died on a deserted heap of rubble.
 And we held his funeral here in our hearts
 And we have engraved on bones
 Torn by weariness and sadness:
 We engraved on them letters that
 Will light the way to a wandering spirit.
 And from the mouths of our fathers
 We have sucked the songs of the inferno,
 The moaning of the flames.
 And, O Say, one day we shall return
 To rebuild our homes and our pathways.

CHILDREN OF THE "SPRING FLOWER" NEIGHBORHOOD*

Al-Jaily Abdel-Rahman

Our neighborhood is hidden away in the "Abidin Quarter
 Its houses rising high like castles
 Obstructing the light from its children
 Hungry for light, flowers, and life.
 Drowned in their grief and sad yearning,
 Its windows are like the ribs of the dead
 Its gate is a hag.

* * * * *

On the dark wall
 Is a plate embedded in a crust of dust
 Whose letters are eaten away, yet it fragrantly smells
 "Spring Flower."

* * * * *

In the morning the men go out
 Their feet exhausted, coughing their silence away
 Praying to god in supplication
 "O God
 Open up doors for us
 Make our livelihood easy"

Their feet disappear in the crowd of life
 The noises of fighting rise and curses are exchanged

* / Translated by: Issa J. Boullata - with the kind permission of
 Three Continents Press.

The seller of leeks and watercress
 Sings out his calls
 His voice darting like doves in the sky.
 He struts about like a village goose
 And the curses subside.

* * * * *

The girls send forth from the windows of the homes
 The fragrance of songs
 Longing for neon-lights and perfumes
 In a distant world
 And for dressed-up swaggering bridegrooms.
 They bear leaf in the hearts
 And vineyards weave the rays of daylight
 For "Spring Flower."

* * * * *

Our neighborhood is hidden away in the 'Abidin Quarter
 Its children in the morning play merrily like birds
 Building dams, jumping like monkeys
 Mohammed's eyes as clear as honey
 Become moist with tenderness
 Sabir's face is as round as a silver coin
 Rif'at's nose goes forth like a beak.

* * * * *

His sister Yasamin is like a blossom
 With an anklet on her foot.
 On a crystal-bright and sunny day
 They gathered as though they were full moons
 Mohammed telling them with the lips of birds
 About an equestrian statue in the Square
 About water flowing to the sky
 From a fountain that can be lighted
 About the many green trees.
 "Our neighborhood stretches out like a snake,
 brothers,
 Whose houses are palaces,
 Sells clothings of women and men
 Is a mister whose look is as red as watermelon."
 And the children exclaimed, "O my goodness!"

* * * * * * * * * *

Yasamin drooped her head in angelic innocence
 To dribble words, like a flower diffusing fragrance,
 "Mohammed, I want your father to bring me a dress."
 A question wandered on their faces
 Their eyes fell on his old garment
 His little head was enveloped with worries
 And tears shimmered.

* * * * * * * * * *

And when men, like sorrow, returned
 Their feet veiny, coughing their silence away
 And when darknes set in like clouds
 The children in the nests babbled
 Asking at supper about palaces
 About an equestrain statue in the Square
 About the many green trees
 Their tears flowed in "Spring Flower."
 Mohammed and the children and dreams sleep.
 Our heighborhood is hidden away in the 'Abidin Quarter
 Its houses rising high like castles
 Its gate is a hag.

* * * * * * * * *

On the dark wall
 Is a plate embedded in a crust of dust
 Whose letters are eaten away, yet it fragrantly smells
 "Spring Flower."

LUCY*

Muhi Al-Din Faris
(1930-)

I have heard the story.

I listened to the details till the end

And spilled my miseries on every path.

No, not because you are black like me

And your color is my color

And your wound is my wound.

And your sadness is my sadness

Expressed in my songs,

But because you are a human being

Tortured and lost in the darkness

Knocking on the wide door of life

And the forbidden door is closed in your face.

* * * * *

You are innocent, yes, sister

You are in the land of McCarthyism, innocent.

In your voice there are tones deep and daring

Like a burst of thunder on the ears

Words full of hope and light.

I am but looking for the land of truth

And equality in whose embrace Man lives in happiness

And the birds fly free

Where flowers flourish at all times

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

Where the thorns of humiliation

Grow not in the depths

Where no heart suffers what you have suffered.

* * * * *

If your world walks slowly like a tortoise

Put your hand in mine and let us follow the steps of the procession

To give life to the dry seeds in every dying ear of corn

And write our history anew.

* * * * *

I did not hate the white

But I hated the darkness of his deeds.

I loved all the Universe

All humanity

All the inspiring ideals

But I hate him who denied

The light to our dark eyes

And who erected everlasting night in our Land

Shutting out the light of the stars with his hands.

THE "BELOVED"

Salah Ahmed Ibrahim
(1933-)

I sought to make you, sister, a present
 For you whose eyes radiate compassion
 And who fills my heart with warmth and tenderness.
 I collected together the sandalwood and sprinkled it with oil
 And lighted the wood.
 I blew on it until my lungs were filled with smoke.
 The wood was kindled into flames.
 On the flames I melted treasures of silver and gold
 And stirred the molten metal with both my hands,
 My naked ebony body perspiring with running sweat
 The glow of the flames reflected in my face
 And in my ears the voices of innocent children
 In a chorus chanting hymns with sincerity and innocence,
 With faith and warmth
 Ringing in the sacred silence like silver bells.
 There I stood, upright, like a giant in front of the anvil
 And hammered "the word" into a salver
 And polished it with the light of my eyes until it shone
 And on it I traced my dreams
 And with mystic letters wrote on it my love story
 And engraved on it magic charms and spells
 From the age of Solomon

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. Al-Shoush.

And inscribed two letters from your name and mine.
I poured water on my skin, combed my hair
Sprinkled perfume and scented my body
And threw on my shoulders a red cloak
And hurried to you almost flying with wings being so happy
And in front of the door hesitated.
Then I remembered the brown face,
The tenderness in the brown face,
The smile on the brown face,
On that day, on that night,
When you came like a symbol of one's dreams
Walking on my heart, bright green dress
Banishing all moods of dejection.
I knocked on the door and called,
I knocked again and listened.
No answer, except muffled whispers
From behind the closed door -- which was as silence.
Time passed,
And I was still in front of the silent door
I was still there.
Answer, sister, even to reject or laugh at me.
Had I made a mistake
Or is it, sister, that I came too late.

IN A STRANGE LAND*

Salah Ahmed Ibrahim

Have you ever tasted the humiliation of being colored
 And seen the people pointing at you, shouting:
 "Hey, you, the black nigger."
 Have you gone one day to watch the children playing
 With all your tenderness and yearning
 And when you just forgot yourself and were about to cry
 With a heart full of compassion,
 "How marvellous are children when they play;"
 They noticed you and rushed after you in a long procession,
 "A black nigger, a black nigger, a black nigger."

* * * * *

Have you one day tasted hunger in a strange land
 And slept on the damp ground, the hard barren ground
 With your head on your arms to protect you from the accursed
 cold?
 And when you go, you stir doubts in eyes,
 Feeling the whispers of people and winks of women,
 And a pointing finger opens the wound in your stabbed heart.
 And always carrying the color of your skin like a shame
 And in your side wriggles the feeling of a human being
 And you cry with a heart stifled and suffocated.

*/ Translated by: Dr. M. I. al-Shoush.

Such humiliation the black suffers in a strange land,
In a land where the measure of people is color.

* * * * *

One week passed, and two weeks and I am hungry,
Hungry and no heart cares.

Thirsty, and they would not give me a drink.

And the Nile is far, the Nile is far.

I am alone, thinking of my mother and my brothers

And the one who recites the Quran in the middle of the night

In my country, the far away land of my friends,

Lying far beyond the sea and the desert,

In my country, where the stranger is respected

And the guest loved

And given the last drop of water in the middle of summer

And preferred with the dinner of the children

Or met with a welcoming smile when there is nothing to give.

* * * * *

And I began to sing with yearning -- my pain is keen.

O migrating birds that are flying towards my land

By God, carry me with you, I am ready,

Fate has shorn my wings

And in a corner, I sit on my baggage

And when the shadow recedes I move to another.

* * * * *

But the birds have gone and left me

They did not understand the meaning of my song.

MALUAL*

Salah Ahmed Ibrahim

Malual, before you deny me
 Listen to my story of the South and the North
 The story of enmity and brotherhood from ancient times
 The Arab, the carrier of the whip,
 The driver of the camels,
 Descended on the valleys of the Sudan like Summer rains.

* * * * * * * * *

With the book and the ways of the Prophet . . .
 Carrying his ambitions and his plates
 And two dates and his ancestral tree . . .
 A reality blossomed in the womb
 Of every slave mother of a free man
 The progeny of the seeds of your Arab ancestors
 Among them were the Fur and the Funj
 And all those who are charcoal black
 A reality as large as the elephant and like the crocodile
 And like the high mountains of Kassala . . .
 He lies who says in the Sudan
 That I am pure
 That my ancestry is not mixed
 That my ancestry is not tinted

* / Translated by: Faker al-Deen Mohamed and Dr. Francis Deng.

He is truly a liar . . .

* * * * *

Malual, it is the voice of 'Rabih'*

That speaks through my tongue

Rabih: The ornament of your Jangey (Dinka)*

The leopard of your proud Jurs

And the lion-cub of your Nam Nams.

Abdul Fadil*, The Crocodile of the Nile Islands

And the unshakeable heart of my country -

Is only your cousin, Malual

While Thabit* - who never flinched

When death sniffed his rib-bones

In the outskirts of Khartoum

Might have been a relative on your mother's side

As for Ali*, the son of the dignity of this people

The eye, the tongue, the conscience

And the hand of this people

The Great Ali, he is but a sibling from your tribe.

The flute is smashed

But some of its sweetness melodies

Are still swimming in the air

I hear it with the ear of Walt Whitman, saying:

May you live as bothers, despite everything,

In full brotherhood.

Filling with love this big compound,

This big homeland.

Its echoes are rolling in my blood

Oh you garden of various flowers . . .

In you . . .

I smell the aroma of a beautiful future.

* * * * *

When everybody is embracing the other

In the way the tranquil White Nile

And the vigorous Blue Nile

Are flowing into each other in the confluence

And when they came together and all of them . . .

Arabs, Beja, Nuba, Fajalo, Barya, Barta, Bango, Zagawa,

Ambararu, Ingasana, Dinka, Tabula, Acholi, Nuer,

Masalit, Anunk, Latuka and others, and more others

Coming to the festival with everyone present.

But with jubilation and much self-confidence

And pride in his small thing . . .

Let us think together, Malual.

DECEPTION*

Salah Ahmed Ibrahim

I sat all night with the world,
 listening to the news
 We say to the poet, "You lied before,
 do you lie twice?"
 "The White Revolution," he said . . .
 the fellows - the rope is at their necks.
 What hypocrisy!
 You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
 "Peace all over the country," he said . . .
 Welcome the limping sheep to the herd.
 You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
 My town, Khartoum, her throat is full of blood.
 What do bullets do in Khartoum?
 You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
 The writer lied, the speaker, the broadcaster,
 The preacher with the beard and big stomach.
 You lied before, do you lie twice?

-

* / See S. Hale.

THE RETURN TO THE SEA*

Mustafa Sanad
(1936-)

Inflame the sea with bridges from the silk of the sun:
To us returns
Our glance that sits in the courtyard and creeps
On house walls
How often did I, alone, visit you in the time of fertility
Like lightning that ingnites in the sand of shores
The desire to perish in the bosom of the expanse and the wind
Engulfs us, yet does not torment us
Smooth is its forearm and rosy are its fingertips
Ask the sand where we drew the shadow of our evenings.

* * * * *

And travelled with the rains,
Permeating our voice with warmth
And singing for the trains and the phantoms of caravans
O, mountains of the east, stary for every and stretch
From the horizons in thousands of chains
To the lips of the sea and the summer that brands with fever
The roses of snow, and grows, as the fire in the cup
Wafts through the sighing of drinkers.

* * * * *

*/ Translated by: Fathel-Bari Ahmed.

You, mountains of the east and you, silence,
That at night fraternized
With hurricanes and lowered into the cavities of the deep and
the secrets
The echoes of ancient chronicles
Tell him who comes weeping with the wounds of the heart,
Bending his head that swims
In the sea of the dejection of defeats,
Tell him who carries with him a torrent of eyes that still
Could send forth arrows and lightning,
That the tide of blue that expands beneath the sand
Like the red that recedes below the skin
Carries not the spoils of profit
Tell him who blows the fire of ribs whereupon rancour is
precipitated
That the trees of heaven had fallen,
And revealed the secret of the coast that slept in the land
Of suffering, a mist and a shadow
Tell him who is apostate to the rites of the sea,
And him who is immersed in them,
That the sun-kings' rite of pilgrimage comes hence,
It comes from the upland that made the joys of tranquil faces
blossom
Morning migrated to adorn their flesh that went around from
auction to auction

To the eternal obscurity stagnant in the heart of darkness.

* * * * *

Light migrated to them

From the echo of their rumbling that weeps with the lears of

The austere contender

A singer who shed all feathers in song and swooped

From the lofty pinnacle to kill himself

O night, slow down, O night, and visit the home of the shore

Then from the beach, return to us

A melody ascending from the heart of the mirrors of waves

From below the bones of the tide

From the gate of distant lighthouses

O languid night, be a fetter to the wind

That curbs the ring that discords with the rhythm

And howl in cloisters where

The seasons fell and began to weave the spindles of their sorrow

And sing of their ebullient blood that yearns for newer arteries

For the motive was a field from the roses of the sun

Whose verdant face invaders' feet had trampled

For the impulse was a guitar,

It rang . . . to gladden us and give us as gifts

The songs of light and splendor, and shed on us

A rain . . . to blossom in us and leave to us

Only that geniality which we love, and the recollection of

The recurring sounds of the roundelays of caravan chanters

Taking from us the song of silence and of staring at the shore
You secret of parfuritions that save for grace
And the shadows of comeliness
The moment of blossoming, a history of exodus
To the absolute, implanted beneath the coatings of suggestion
Its quiescent heart stirred by the sweetness of a smile
Flashed by the lightning.
Or the lightning from feebleness
To powerfulness had become a means
That opened the gates of resurrection
It inflamed the sea with bridges from the silk of the sun,
Tempted us . . . we crossed and divested ourselves of modesty,
We uncovered before it
The lasciviousness of life that remained adolescent
In the time of hardship and deprivation,
To the gatherer of tradition and custom we submitted
The garments of our anchorages
And the gowns of security
And we drowned . . .
We shall never return without the sea carrying us
Along with pearls saturated with vision inside shells,
And giving us as gifts . . . its speech.

MAN AND SEA-BIRDS*

Mohammed Abdel-Hai
(1944-)

The blue stone floats on the water of the early sun
where the sea-birds return
after death
as melting salt
and as golden fish among the coral reefs . . .
where Man lives
victoriously and defeated
on the coast of the water of silence
lingering between bright sobriety and drunkenness
building an inhabited house of bricks of a blue dream.

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

NINAVEH*

Mohammed Abdel-Hai

1

Why are you in the belly of the ship
 Blue flames in the sea and sun in the skies over the town?

* * * * * * * * * *

2

You are from the Sahara of sea-water through dimness
 bald-headed, naked and weak
 a shock, a violent glow
 in the colliding visions.

* * * * * * * * * *

3

Have no fear! It is the earth. So do not forget the roots.
 Have no fear! Vainly you try to escape this resurrection.

* * * * * * * * * *

4

You will see
 your burnt face in the old panic
 twisting and vanishing
 through the spasms of the nebula.

* * * * * * * * * *

* / Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

5

Through the flame

you will the see

your face is a diamond that purifies and floats

carrying in its glitter the face of the town.

O legendary laughter of the sun

At the fear of the melancholy masses.

QUEEN JANSHAH*

Mohammed Abdel-Hai

THE KINGDOM OF THE SEA

Below the waters of the sea, where memory does
 not preceive the sun, she built her throne
 Below the waters of the sea, in all four corners of the sea,
 From marble cut.
 Inlaid with green sea-shells, pearls and ancient metals
 Adorned with the pictures of strange birds and dragons
 that had copulated and hatched
 In the hot mire before the sea boiled up and then receded
 So that the sun could rise upon the beginning of the
 consciousness of a newer world.

* * * * * * * * *

Below the waters of the sea, her marble throne
 Filled the kingdom of the waters with its phosphorous light
 And above, the waters were lowering
 Their dream-green trapped light
 And around her, the sea-horses
 Whinnied, and the whales
 Cleft the flesh of the sea
 And the sea-insects
 Were inscribing their unique dialogues

*/ Translated by: Fathel-Bari Ahmed.

With flaccid talons upon the sea-snot mollusc.

* * * * *
* * * * *

PROSE LIGHTING

Queen Janshah! I saw her emerge on midsummer night
 and hold her wedding feast on the remote coral islands;
 Burn a sea-tree splinter in a conch censer and speak
 In the ancient cipher of the sea, whereupon the colossal
 green smoke would rise,
 And the sea would foam and ebb.
 Then the waves would come, lift what lay beneath them and
 flow on to the shore.
 Water-snakes and sharks and dolphins and whales
 Crabs and hermit-crabs and those sea-creatures with shells
 And scales -- led by Frog, chief of the water --
 Animals, riding a log of wood.

* * * * * * * * *

King Salamander in his shirt of fire glowing with his own purity,
 And the angel gull, and the family of fish,
 And the host of imp reptiles and insects in
 Their agate and emerald, and turtles in their sapphired
 Shields, and nameless elements unfolding their treasures on the
 sands.
 And the dance begins in the noon of the deep silver

At the borders of the dangerous waters.

* * * * *

Ah Janshah! Some of the risk on your body is safety.

But

He who perishes in the enormous fires of waves between your
thighs, filled

With the dense shades of desire, would become part of what he
had perished in.

* * * * *

* * * * *

THE REPLY OF POETRY

The poet does not offer himself to the sea to be

drowned in it and become in the paradise

Of magic one of its reptiles. The sea is not our home.

We are the home of the sea.

In the noon of the primitive sun the speech of the sea

Filters through us.

A violent god in the shirt of the pure language

Dares to allow the kingdom of the sea to creep up in his limbs,

To come to consciousness,

Spread

And glow

In the cells of his precious despair

With its green light in his luxuriant blood

Or in the sweat of his brow.

SENNAR*

Mohammed Abdel-Hai

When we voyaged to Sennar through darkness
 The lote-tree of history was shaken by a wind blowing
 from the islands of the dead
 And the black-feathered curlew was singing
 On the thorny branches and old tune
 From Tihraga's* balcony.
 Then we penetrated with the wind deep into the desert
 (The desert was buried towns in the sands,
 Visible ghosts and wrecked bones)
 And we descended through the fence of the forest
 And the green swamp and the bridge.
 Have we returned?
 We are within a bowshot. Have we returned?
 Lo! There is the first gate: Have we returned?
 How could not we?
 There is a bronzed face, a book,
 Golden inscriptions, a shield
 And spears of ebony.
 It was a dream to see the beginning and the birth of rituals.

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

RETURN TO SENNAR*

Mohammed Abdel-Hai

This night my kingsmen welcome me:
 A horse trotting in the circle of fire,
 Dancing in bells and silk,
 A woman opening the door of the river,
 Calling out of the darkness
 Of the silent mountain and the dense forest.
 The guards of the blue language

Kingdom:

One comes walking proudly in his leopard skin,
 And one shining in his water garments.

* * * * * * * * *

The spirits of my grandfathers walk out
 Of the silver of the river's dreams,
 Out of the night of names,
 And possess the bodies of children.

*/ Excerpt from 'The Return to Sennar', Translated by: Mohammad Abdel-Hai.

THE FRUIT AND THE NECTAR*

Mohammed Al-Mekki Ibrahim /
(1939-)

A Mullato (Creole)

A rose drenched with color

Your eyes are deep wells of kohl*

Verses of a lullabay entwine your body.

* * * * *

I am the nectar

You are the fruit

And a thousand creole buds

Blossom in your womb.

* * * * *

African

And Arab

You are the equivocal word of God.

* * * * *

He who buys you steals

The Fragrance of cloves

From the evening breeze

The shores from the island

The waves from the ocean

And the warmth of the rising sun.

* * * * *

* / Translated by: Dr. Ushari Ahmed Mahmud.

He who owns you
Wins a balm for the wound
And a dirge to soothe his grief.

* * * * *

He who buys you
Takes me too.
Do I dare forsake my soul
And abandon the word of God?

* * * * *

Let them ask the bending palms
If they have seen sands like yours
Bathed and glistening.

* * * * *

Let them ask the bays shrouded in mystery
If the virgin mermaids
Even in a dream
Compared with you.

* * * * *

Let them ask the waves of invaders
If in the days of war
They have met a rebel like you.

* * * * *

Let them ask.

And at dawn every dove will sing

For your beauty in bloom.

Let them ask.

And the sword and the word will answer.

* * * * *

O luscious fruit.

They tried to suck out the wine of your life

Until the mere dregs are ripped

From the womb of your casque.

* * * * *

They were here to desecrate the sanctuary of your honor

Until debauchery broke loose

And shamelessness defied the gaze of the day.

* * * * *

Now they are gone.

But the deep casque remains full

Round and round the buckets overflow

And the goblets continue in revolution.

* * * * *

Shake the roots of the spring

And of sorrows bygone

Purify your mind.

Wrench the sleepy citadel towers
 Until the wake
 And withhold the vision of the future.

* * * * *

Honey bees roam the fields
 And blossoms unfold for you.
 The East is Red.
 And you are clad on joy.

* * * * *

Forward we move as they lag behind
 Until we reach the end.

* * * * *

Slumber captures the eyes of your lovers
 As the return with fantasies.

* * * * *

Why do the palm trees sway in confusion?
 The birds of the bay sing no more?
 And the whole world sleeps --
 Except for me
 Your perfume
 And the crossed spears of your guards?

* * * * *

The moment I leave them behind,
 Panting, I race to you
 My hair is wet
 My arms with flames aglow.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Leave the gates open
 Warm your bed for me
 And wear the fragrance of musk.
 For cradled in your arms at dusk
 I have a long tale to relate.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

O luscious fruit
 The moments of love are short lived.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dawn breaks
 The sea calms down
 In admiration the palm leaves rustle
 The palace lake is dyed with deep blue indigos
 The honey bees saturate the rose buds with kisses.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I am rendered youthful again
 Glowing with splendor
 And draped with radiant beams of the new light.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Reflect on my face for a while
 Ponder deeply on my countenance.

* * * * *

For with the imminent ebb I leave
 But with the forthcoming flow I will come back
 Carried in the winds
 The waves
 And the stars.

* * * * *

In my resurrection
 I will come back from the dead.
 My face
 You will recognize.

* * * * *

For you have engraved my name
 In the sands and the rocks.
 And in commemoration
 I have become a remembrance
 Gleaming in the slates of love.

* * * * *

Now I pass away
 My craving for the aroma of your body unsatiated

My desire for the touch of your breasts unquenched.

* * * * *

Promise you will invite me again
To the warmth of your bosom
And lock the night of your hair.

* * * * *

To my strong arms
That your color blends into mine
And we become one.

* * * * *

I cease to exist in this world
I have become absorbed in you.
Unite me to the graves of the equatorial flowers
Attach me to the days of suffering
Chain me to the times of slavery
Bring together my immortal remains
And wrap your arms around my soul.

* * * * *

O Creole

I still scent the perfume
And the vigour of your body
A naked African
A chaste Arab
You are the equivocal word of God.

A FINGER IN THE SUN*

Mohammed Al-Mekki Ibrahim

In her breasts the wound takes refuge, the wayfarer steals
along in his shame and the strangers rejoice.

In her breast are the distances of stars, the blazing of
fever and the craving of the pulse of things.

Here the spontaneity of the genuine act becomes an age of
crowns,

Stretched out as tables of blessings and gifts.

For us the specious orbits revolve,

And the stars dangle down in a bunch

From her nakedness; takes some tobacco and music and

In the heart of this dismay use your abilities,

A color and an adornment.

And as she yields, tear the wall of consciousness

Thrust a finger in the eye of the sun.

* * * * * * * * * *

And we remember how we cut into her legs so that she could feed
us,

One noon, on grass and diadems,

And that it is only the hungering after consolation and the
crossing of the secret that blinds us

And that the other, the body,

*/ Translated by: Fathel-Bari Ahmed.

As we assault, is an eternity of existence whose features are
effaced

And we know that this rip in the breasts is the wound of the
age a rupture in our will exuding blood

A bleeding that reddens history and spills on the forehead of
God

The shame of His flight from us as we stretch out our hands to
catch the stars

And I know He no longer worries nor remembers us nor does He
care

And that we have our will and a generation from the solitudes
of the earth

Rapping, in the corners of the wood, the drum of creation
generating the idea of genesis

On our porch Noon scratched his beard and glanced at us
Rejoicing in our suffering

Rejoicing as consciousness burned in the white coma

Because when we cease the universe does not remain and the
bloom of things perishes

On our porches colossal Time crumbled down to particles that
rusted and were bored by the endless road and lassitude

Because the orbits of the suns are in us,

And in our consciousness live the cells of time and things

Because an evasion that lives behind our conscious existence,
Explodes through our intuitions carrying the spring of life
and its eternal glory.

With this consciousness I accept what is in your hands and
vow to live with and against and within the other.

PERHAPS GIDDINESS*

Mohammed Al-Mekki Ibrahim

When they cut deep into me
 When my heart clean-glittered with peals of dew
 -- with pearls of dew and echoes, my heart --
 When he made me a witness, a son and a father,
 He was an angel.
 But when he left,
 He was a traitor . . .
 An unbeliever . . .
 Leaving me my wounds
 Leaving me sleepless and wanting
 Leaving me.

* * * * * * * * *

And yet, he had great beauty.
 He wrapped me in the clothes of security,
 In the folds of wonder and brilliance
 Crowned me in the bubbling froth of the sun,
 With perfume and wrath
 With flaming curls and garments of light.
 Crowned me with the beauty of a princess.
 But at the evening's end
 He stripped away the curls as I lay sleeping
 Stripped away the covers

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

And delivered me to the cruel cruel winter.

To the Gods, I cursed him.

* * * * *

And yet . . .

When he won me, he caught me with power and took me
to the heavens.

He thrust me up and through the star-lined spaces

And around, throughout all the vast distances

From coast to coast;

Around.

He let me see the lights fade:

The final tear of sight before darkness.

And there were tears, too, upon the eye-lids of the angel,
Wet with piety and rain.

O I was drunk with the calm and the deep sighs

Breathing through the lungs of seas and islands

Trobbing like a star suspended in both time and place.

When I felt the wings below me loose,

And the horse beneath me shy;

And dropped beyond both history and space.

I fall, and cannot see the end

I fall, and, who knows,

Perhaps I fall to re-ascend.

Perhaps, just giddiness.

* * * * *

I am sometimes carried by my own imagination to the
sea-shore,

To those stained and oily coasts,

To the loneliness, the solitude

Of stained shores and spices.

To the islands leaning out their arms to sea,

Like a woman.

The waters bend towards the moon-lit sky,

Springs flow from flowering branches

And the wind entwines the cover's crown.

So now I can relax beneath the clearness of the water top,

And in the lazy overflowing of the waves

Surging from the bitterness of weeping.

I rest within the torn remains

That come from calling up the Gods

And competing for survival.

Then, when all is clear,

My spirit sees through the caverns of my body,

Your face

Through the waves and foam it shines,

Brilliant with forgiveness, sleep and a tear of regret,

Incomparable.

I have seen it, clear and unembellished.

I have seen your face chase away my fear.

And with it the night . . .

So that day breaks, shines, ends and giddiness begins.

* * * * *

Protect me from such giddiness

Protect me from my lover, brighter than sunlight.

Such a lover that has ruined and defended me

The callous killer and the harbinger of life.

The lover causing giddiness.

The sweetness of remembrance, O Lord, the sweetness of the stream

The river of the future and the promise impossibly cast

A touch of happiness and eternal drops of pain.

Tell me, how long

Does

 This

 Giddiness

 Last?

THE KNIGHT'S MASK*

Al-Nur Osman Abbakar
(1938-)

Hide this beauty from the old magician's eyes,
 From the moon,
 From those who ever worry to see me heavy with my sadness,
 From amateurs of geomancy in the musty alleys of the town
 (Tendeli)* is jealous of you.
 (Azat Al-khalil)* is jealous of you.
 I am jealous of my eye which beholds you --
 Dressed and naked.
 When I carry a rebec, I descend to hell
 Deceiving and injuring the guards
 And gathering your hidden beauty.
 Wear an amulet
 And mask my blind mask!

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

ATTRITION*

Al-Nur Osman Abbakar

My love's statue in the fort
Is guarded by the snake's dire measures.
The bells of my vision
Are bridled by one glance from a snake.
I run like water, like the flow of a breast.
I slumber like a shadow
And become a boon companion to grass in the ditch,
In the bird's nest, in the fort
Where I feel the presence of my sword.
The green moss disfigures its holder
And paralyses my going
And my coming.
Her nocturnal visitor makes me weep in the night.
Makes the guards and the snake weep for it.

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

THE CHILD SINGS ON THE BALCONY*

Al-Nur Osman Abbakar

My sweetheart's deep sighs in exile
 Are poured out by a forgotten guitar
 In the child's mind.

My sweetheart's features in exile
 Are a shawl in the wind
 Carried to the branches of the balcony
 By a bird,
 A white bird like wings of mercy.

My sweetheart's deep sighs are a guitar.
 My sweetheart's features are a bird.
 In my heart a firebrand from the kingdom
 Of that much to see' morning
 Rubbed what was split on my cheek
 From the islands of dimness in my path,
 Filled the two eyes
 With the visions of two alienated life-times.

My sweetheart's deep sighs are a bird
 My sweetheart's feature are a guitar.
 The child embraces the guitar.
 The child communes with the bird.
 The child sings on the balcony.

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

DREAM OF THE OLD FACE*

Tierab Al-Sharief
(1945-)

The islands of seas are ripped up
Exhaling musk, ambergis,
Scents and incense
They pervaded the perfumes of their origins
On the waves as a gale.
A gale that checks the immunity of the resident rust.

* * * * *

What have the wrestling waves
But a voiceless ringing?
But the tempest of neighing?

* * * * *

Do these islands follow
The trail of the sea-gulls when they migrate?
Do they watch the ships harboring off
When the ages draw nearer to their funeral ceremonies?
And when time burns?

*/ Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir.

THE CONTOURS OF MY LOVER'S FACE*

Teirab Al-Sharief

The contours of your face in the morning
 Remind me of my grief,
 Remind me of my wounds.
 I escape from them
 Lest my grief return,
 Lest my wounds re-open.

* * * * *

The contours of your face before sunset
 Remind me of the whinnying,
 The whinnying of the hearts
 That committed suicide
 That opened their eyes,
 Shed two tears
 And vanished,
 Killing themselves twice.

* * * * *

The contours of your face after sunset
 Adorn my heart with dignity,
 For when darkness comes,
 You flood me with light.
 I am dazzled
 And joy fills my heart.

* / Translated by: Al-Sir Khidir and Salah Hassan.

OLDEN DAYS*

Ali Al-Mak
(1937-)

In you the locusts scratched the earth;
 In you our food is coarse.
 Your people are in trouble.
 My limbs shiver when I see the poor of your people in winter.
 I do remember you when I remember the other's words:

"In the country of the blind
 the color of the earth
 and the color of the sky appear the same.
 Its desert is waterless
 and its space is limitless"

Oh!

"Oh! the recollection of sumptuous living
 And the memory of the olden days."

*/ Translated by: Al-Fatih Mahjoub.

OMDURMAN*

Ali Al-Mak

Whenever we meet
The multitude becomes overwhelming.
Feet follow feet.
Heads knock on heads and walls.
Here the streets roll
With men in tatters
And poltroons.
Exhaltations besiege us
Cordons of guards terrify us.
Alas, the air has become scarce,
For this is the town of carbon dioxide
And cyanide . . .
Let us go to a hidden place.
A spacious place,
Its borders are a mirage
Its earth is salt,
Its sun rises for you,
The sun of suns.
Oh you, there!
Let us go.

*/ Translated by: Al-Fatih Mahjoub.

TULIPS

Hussein Sharief

Tulips

Armies of the Sun

Have been conscripted

As storm-troopers

Long ago

No breeze

Or easy wind

Will ever shake the waxy rigid order

This regiment

Of faintly ascended heads

Sober as colored judges

Stands to attention

Every dawn

In straight and even lines

A firing squad

Blaring boom

Loud rainbows

Frozen flags of satin doom

Unbent

Stiff

Shiny

Arrows.

SOMEONE . . .

Hussein Sharief

Someone . . .

Very inca

We all said

From inside our carapace

Of hot metal

Looks almost well-bred

Amazing, beautiful, rigid, stoneface

Cascades of stiff black hair

Falling softly night on easy shoulders

Pantaloons:

Full moons

One leg was striped

In sherbet colors

The other

Plain

Hands in kid gloves

Liquorice allsorts

And ports

Are mouths

The ships

Dip in

Lick in

Come in

Liquid

Salt fellatio.

COLD SUMMER NIGHT

Hussein Sharief

This night
For one thing
It's too long
And so different
Despite the full moon
From any other
I've known with you
Why?
. . . is a question
Which perhaps can only be answered
By that waxy plastic rose
On that dreadful vase
Or that nose
. . . sinuses?
Or just a sign of impending doom
Bloom!
False Teeth
Unwashed
Waiting for a signal to smile
On flexible gums
To lose Lautrec
Would be the ultimate tragedy
. . . be brilliant

Shine

Be mine.

FOR BABS

Hussein Sharief

Timbuktu

Take it

It may belong to you

It may lack

Some black

Or cool

Saharan dreams

Cassatas

Icy-veined carrara marble

Neopolitan ice creams

Where it's warm

Not hot

This is not

It's just hard

As kimberley

Trying hard not to melt

In that heat

Pretending to be

The human green belt

And twinkling

With a bad wink

A slit-eyed nazi squint

And a terrible stink

Diamond
Damned
Blue or pink
Icy
Some cold heat!
Neither thine
Nor mine
That awful mine
Harsh and stiff
A straight narrative line
Taught
So taut . . . it will snap
And me
I'm superman
Or super-she
But I think
I'm less black
And less pink.

THE SHREDS OF LANGUAGE AND THE CLASHES OF
THE ULTIMATE IMAGE OF DON QUIXOTE*

Osman Jamal Al-Din

The pearls, the windmills and the alien flesh
 In the womb of the first woman became
 an embryo, a foetus from the canals of the defeted
 And uttered a rule which is the existent
 The metaphor of the language of woman,
 in the convention of the current,
 Is to choose a dervish of a beetle,
 A son from the clay of the spring of Zamzam,
 Screams from the padding of dreams and she conceived;
 A first-born, 'the news' became a question,
 A salivation with an insane prelude.
 Lean beneath the skin and fortifications; it could kill you,
 virginhood
 Don Quixote,
 With the sound of creation your right fingers burst
 Shout, the word years, runs and by the mills is slain.
 This is the mirage: a woman from the narrow of thirst,
 Wine and irreverence your woman is the road to invasion
 And the broken sword with the blunted edge, opthalmia of the
 visions,
 Don Quixote

*/ Translated by: Fathel-Bari Ahmed

Bewitching, my nightdreams
 Are pregnant with the plague and the season of yearning.
 As you ascend, Quixote
 Profanation of the essence, you gallop and slumber without rain,
 You float in history, you rise as we weep.
 We together become honey and restless thoughts.
 My language
 I wobble, a bride in your warmth and a cloister of rightness
 With all I could I almost died in her eyes, I die,
 She remains, her pomp containing neither wood nor certitude.
 My language, who are you
 Don Quixote
 The voice of him who escapes the bitter taste of my
 woman,
 Blind impotence catches me, I revel in the presence of
 my dame
 Who are you?
 Don Quixote
 Within the hidden future, your torment leaves but anticipation
 Within you, nothing, when you turned, except the virgin,
 her face a train.
 Her light, her gold and those her eyes which are black;
 Of her doing the me is a lie.
 Don Quixote, you who sleep in my lustful language

Regenerate

Things awake just as they did the first time

This moment, drunk with monotheism, the decisiveness

In the souls of chanters and the infidelity of the drums . .

is my prayer.

By the one whose inspiration is the wall of his death,

He who rolls the clouds wherever they be,

I am possible.

* * * * *

A wind of intentions and new superstitions

Unlike dew tilling the cuntry, a road of fingers

It tosses spring and the bareness, you road of fingers

And my gazelle,

She remains in 'she remains' - the chosen one - burns her

prine

So we dream

Of the sun, the horse

And Don Quixote.

THE WAR OF LOVE

Sirr Anai Kelueljang

Oh, what war is this?

A repeat of the olden days?

Why not care a little more

In this time of peace?

* * * * *

Is this the love

Our peace accord has brought?

Then why send these barges

Full of stones?

* * * * *

An indulgence to erode nationhood?

Do you not see

The growing spirit of change

In our national life?

* * * * *

What war is this?

A repeat of the olden days?

Provoking trouble.

* * * * *

When there is no need

For the war of hate

More than the war of love.

ONLY BECAUSE

Sirr Anai Kelueljang

Only because I do not complain
 Nor conspire against so and so,
 You think I am a harmless worm
 Living for my own-sake?

* * * * * * * * *

Only because I smile readily
 And do my work obediently,
 You think I am happy
 Not knowing that the tooth is a bone?

* * * * * * * * *

Only because I talk less about
 What needs our politics must meet,
 You think my head is vacant of ideas
 And I am no more than a mere follower?

* * * * * * * * *

Only because I am pruned to emotion
 Knowing how mad it is to be over-excited,
 You think I am a stone
 And do not feel the pains of my people?

THE LEOPOLD GHOST

Sirr Anai Kelueljang

Africans, oh Africans!

Here before all our eyes

A bloody humiliation rails,

The ancient River weeps

At the return of Leopold's ghost -

Or are these his offspring?

* * * * *

These men who say, 'They've come

To rescue their white nationals,'

After the night of reclamation.

But the history of oppression is still fresh,

For terrible things were done here

Not so many years ago.

* * * * *

To recall one such incident years ago

After a night of nationalist resistance,

And after retreat and retracting

They found the hand of an African child

Lying among blasted rocks!

But where was the body?

None could tell, but the hand

Of a murdered African child!

* * * * *

Oh, Africa is fierce and wild

Without losing her love and care

For overseas fortune hunters who never care

Mother Africa is wild indeed,

For she wants freedom now!

THE DAY I WAS BORN*

Morris Onek Latom

Be born, they who are to be born after me,
 Let me see you who I left behind in the womb,
 How I hate the day I came out of the womb!
 I gave a strange cry when I came out of the womb!
 For I met strange eyes looking at me,
 Strange hands were holding my soft flesh.
 I again gave a strange cry on that evening
 For when I opened my eyes clearly
 I saw that I was cast out of my world.
 Hopeless I lay down trying to breathe.
 My head was hurting me for I was cast out
 With my head pointing downwards.

* * * * * * * * *

Sounds from the widest mouth I had never seen
 almost blocked my ears.
 Lights of the brightest nature I have never seen
 almost made me blind.
 Milk from the biggest breast I had never seen
 was forced into my mouth.
 The hands of the strongest woman I had never seen
 stretched my legs.
 How I hate the day I was born and cast from the womb.

* * * * * * * * *

Be born, they who are to be born after me
 And hear what happened on the day I was born.
 How I hate that day I was born
 For I was given no time to thinks.
 The wind blew over my head and ears,
 Dust poured into my eyes,
 And I was forced to stretch my legs
 In the warm water in the basin.
 I gave a strange cry at that time
 But nobody could be bothered to listen.
 That was on the day I was born.

* * * * *

Be born blind.
 Those I left in my mother's womb,
 For you will retain the sights
 You were used to in the womb.
 See not what makes us in this world
 Blind, frightened . . .

* * * * *

Be born deaf,
 Those I left in my mother's womb,
 For you will hear not
 The abuses that make us hurt.
 You will know not the history
 Of our tribe, our clan . . .

Be born dumb,
 They who are to be born after me,
 For you will talk to nobody
 About the secrets in your mind.
 You will sing the songs in your mind
 To nobody, to yourself . . .

* * * * * * * * * *

Be born lame,
 They who are to be born after me.
 For you will spare your legs
 As you are doing in the womb.
 You will never go hunting . . .

GLOSSARY

- Abdul Fadil - One of the leaders of the 1924 Revolution. He was of Southern Sudanese origin.
- Abidin Quarter - A famous area in Cairo where the poet studied.
- Ali Abdel Latif - The leader of the 1924 revolution. He was of Dinka origin.
- Azat Al-Khalil - The reference is to a famous song in praise of the beloved of the poet (Al-Khalil).
- Atmour Desert - Between Halfa and Abu Hamed, East of the Nile.
- Dervish - A devoted Sufi who wears colored-patched clothes and often dances in the religious ceremonies.
- Dinka - A famous tribe of tall elegant people, the biggest one in the Sudan.
- Jallabia - The Sudanese national dress for men. It is a long garment, usually white.
- Hira' - A famous cave near Mecca, where prophet Mohammed received the Message of God.
- Karia - A sound word in Arabic describing the sound of the running water or the roaring of the drum.
- Al-Kauther - According to Muslims, it is a spring in paradise.
- Keriri - A famous mountain close to Omdurman and where the British defeated the Sudanese armies in 1898.
- Khalwa - Is the traditional institution for learning the Koran and the 3 Rs.
- Kohl - Eye makeup made from bismuth.
- Al-Ma'arra - A town in Syria, where the famous blind Arab poet of the eleventh century lived.
- LaLub - The hard seed of a popular Sudanese fruit, from which they make their beads.
- Maulid - A birthday in Arabic. The Maulid is the celebration of the birth of Prophet Mohammed.

- Abdul Munim - Famous charitable Sudanese after whom the square is named.
- Al-Muqqudam - The leader, the man who starts and leads.
- Nuba - A drum.
- Sennar - The ancient capital of the Kingdom of Funj (1504-1821).
- Sufi - A Muslim mystic.
- Rabih - A nineteenth century Sudanese who built an empire in what is now known as Chad.
- Tar - A special type of a small drum.
- Tendelti - A town in Kordofan, Sudan.
- Thabit - One of the leaders of 1924 revolution in the Sudan.
- Thoub - Is the national Sudanese dress women wrap around their bodies like a sari.
- Tihraga - The most famous of the Kings of Kush - ancient Sudanese Kingdom.
- Tariqa - A religious order or sect.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE POETS

Al-Tigani Yousif Beshir (1910-37) - Born in Omdurman and studied at Omdurman Religious Institute. Worked for a while, as a journalist.

Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub (1910-76) - Born in Omdurman. Graduated from Gordon Memorial College (G.M.C.) as an engineer and later studied law. Worked as engineer for a while, a judge, and a lawyer. Held several ministerial positions and became prime minister. Published several books of poetry and prose.

Yousif Mustafa Al-Tinay (1909-69) - Born in Omdurman, graduated from G.M.C. as an engineer. Turned to journalism and back to government service as Director of the Department of Labor and then an Ambassador. Published three collections of his poetry.

Mohammed Al-Mahdi Al-Magdoub (1919-82) - Born in al-Damer of a famous family known for its role in spreading and teaching of Islam. Studied at G.M.C. and worked as an accountant. Most accomplished poet and prose writer. Published five collections of poetry.

Mubarak Al-Magrabi (1920-82) - Worked in the Department of Prisons and became the General Secretary of National Council for Literature and Arts. Published several books on poetry and one on child delinquency.

Babiker Ahmed Musa (1924-) - Born in Omdurman and graduated from G.M.C. He still teaches English language and History in secondary schools. Published two plays only of his many manuscripts of different writings.

Mohammed Ali Hamad (1924-) - Born in Omdurman. Graduated from G.M.C. and worked as a teacher of English and art for years. A fine painter, photographer and playwright. Recently published a play in English.

Mohammed Al-Fayturi - Born in 1930 of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, al-Fayturi has spent most of his life in Alexandria. He is dedicated to the liberation of the African people. Published several books of poetry.

Al-Jaily Abdel Rahman (1930-) - Born in a small village, say, in Northern Sudan. Studied in Egypt and Moscow. Published some of his poetry.

Muhi Al-Din Faris (1936-) - Born in Argo, Norther Sudan. Studied in Egypt. Teaches Arabic language in secondary schools. Published one book of poetry.

Salah Ahmed Ibrahim (1933-) - Born in Omdurman. Graduated from Khartoum University. Held several government jobs. Resigned as Ambassador. Published several books of poems, stories and other works.

Mustafa Sanad (1936-) - Born in Al-Obeid, Kordfan. Works at the Post and Telegraph Service. Published a number of books of poetry.

Mohammed Abdel Hai (1944) - Born in Khartoum. Studied in Khartoum University and Oxford. Teaches at the University. Published several books, poetry and other literary works.

Mohammed Al-Mekki Ibrahim (1939-) - Born in Al-Oheid, Kordfan. Graduated from Khartoum University and joined the diplomatic Court. Published two books of poetry and one of prose.

Al-Nur Osman Abakkar (1938-) - Born in Kassala. Graduated from Khartoum University. Taught English for years in secondary schools. One of the editors of a monthly magazine in Qatar. Published one book of poetry.

Teirab Al-Sharief - Born in 1945 in Southern Darfur. Graduated from Khartoum University with an honors degree in English. Taught for a while and he is now studying for his Ph.D in Folklore in Indiana University. Published a collection of his poetry.

Ali Al-Mak (1937-) - Born in Omdurman. Graduated from Khartoum University and University of Southern California. An accomplished short story writer and essayist. Published several books of short stories, essays and one of poetry.

Sirr Anai Kluelajang - The most acclaimed poet of the southern region.

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